

from In Search of Consistency: Ethics & Animals

INTRODUCTION

Is moral concern something owed by human beings only to human beings? Certainly two thousand five hundred years of moral philosophy have tended to suggest that this is the case, surprisingly enough, not by systematic argument, but simply by taking it for granted. Yet this answer is by no means obvious, and it crumbles when exposed to the most childlike question of all, "Why." (Rollin 4)

Morality requires that our sentiments be balanced with relevant facts and reason. Philosophy is a "human product"; each individual philosophizes with more than just reason—we use our will, feelings, "flesh and blood," our "whole soul and . . . whole body" (Stern 6). We might wish moral philosophy to be a clean and neat process, predictable and dependable, with absolute answers to complex moral dilemmas, but nothing could be farther from the truth.

This is not to say that people do not have answers. Answers are provided by almost anyone confronted with delicate questions about complicated moral matters. From abortion and addiction to capital punishment and war, people often believe they know what is right for themselves and for those around them. However, neither personal preference nor majority opinion makes a *sound* moral decision, though these definitely can and do determine a *dominant* (popular or common) morality. In fact, the definition of morals conflicts with the idea that what the majority approves is "right" and what the majority disapproves is "wrong." While we are all familiar with the dominant morality of our time and place, the majority is much less aware of whether or not their common moral opinions are rooted in reason and empirical evidence.

Collectively, we participate in an outrageous moral inconsistency. We accept without question the discrepancy between our moral regard for human beings and our lack of moral regard for all other living entities. When returning by car from my parent's home last week, I came upon a medic unit and a police car. A man was sitting on the bumper of one of the medic cars, with skinned knees. Two medics were attending him. He had gone around a corner too fast and had tipped his motorcycle in the street. I drove on, and within half an hour I watched a truck slam into the hind end of a doe. She was

bounding, and as if in slow motion she flew from the front of the truck, spun in the air, and landed in a crumpled heap in the ditch. The truck kept going. The three cars behind the truck kept going. I was the fourth car behind the truck. I watched her try to stand up, her hind end destroyed. There were no medics, no police, not even a pause in the rushing of cars, though she was in shock and terribly wounded. How could a young man with skinned knees receive so much attention, while a doe who had been hit by a truck received no more than the passing glance as the people who had run over her rushed on their way? How many deer were hit that same night; how many of them died slowly in ditches? And what of snakes, opossums, robins, raccoons, swallows, salamanders, and domestic cats and dogs? Can such a morality, where only human life is held to be worthy of preservation and protection, possibly be defensible?

Part I of this book explores moral alternatives to this ongoing discrepancy through the eyes of three contemporary philosophers from three different schools of thought. Tom Regan presents a deontological rights-based theory. Peter Singer offers a utilitarian theory designed to satisfy the maximum number of preferences and enhance preferred outcomes or consequences. The third scholar, Paul Taylor, defends a theory of environmental ethics designed to protect wild organisms, based on the inherent worth of teleological entities.

Part II begins by discussing the work of Andrew Linzey, a theologian. Chapter 4 presents and critiques Linzey's theory of Christian obligation of servitude to God's creation (including cactus wrens and channel cats) rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. Including a chapter on theology in a philosophy book will seem strange to some, but theology is central to moral issues in general, and important to ethical theories regarding treatment of nonhuman animals for two reasons. First, understanding theology enhances our understanding of morality in general. Philosophy was for many years the handmaid and mouthpiece of the church; philosophers labored to prove the existence of God and to solve "the problem of evil" which troubled many Christian scholars. In that sense, Western morals cannot be separated from Christianity. Many of our moral standards, from attitudes about abortion to laws regarding gay marriage, have been formed by the dominant religious tradition—Christianity.

Second, many Westerners are Christians. The United States in particular remains strongly Christian (as evidenced by church affiliation). While philosophical works rooted in scientific notions (evolution and

ethology, utilitarianism and rights theories) might have no impact on conservative Christians, Linzey's work will. Arguments are more effective when the person you are talking to can relate to what you are saying, and when what you are saying *really matters* to them personally. For a strong Christian, scripture is key. Linzey speaks to those of faith as Regan speaks to those who feel strongly about human rights. For this reason it is critical to include Linzey in this volume and to make use of religious—specifically Christian—language, as is done in chapter 5.

The sixth chapter explores protectionist ethics across religious traditions. This segment of the book investigates “animal-friendly” lore from indigenous, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist, and Islamic religious traditions, revealing protectionist tendencies across religious traditions from around the world.

Part III explores the consistent and impartial application of contemporary Western morality through the Minimize Harm Maxim. The Minimize Harm Maxim consistently applies everyday, commonsense American respect for human life to cover all life-forms that are similar in morally relevant ways, resulting in a *significantly* expanded ethic, complete with a new array of moral dilemmas.

Before discussing the abovementioned theories, it is necessary to prepare some general groundwork. Chapter 1 introduces terms that are important to the overall text and explains and justifies methods used in this text. These terms and methods are explained because they are immediately necessary to the content and intent of this book, or because they are not specific or central to any one of the four theories discussed. Terms such as “rights,” or “utilitarianism” will be discussed thoroughly in chapters specific to those concepts. Because reading terms and methods can be tedious, readers can gain the core of each term and method by reading the first sentence of each subsection and then move on to the next term or method. For more in-depth coverage of the topic, read the entire section.